
Craig Van Gelder, ed., *The Missional Church and Leadership Formation: Helping Congregations Develop Leadership Capacity*. Grand Rapids: William E. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009, pp. 238. \$20.00.

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The Missional Church & Leadership Formation is the fruit of an ongoing conversation on the missional church that has taken place among the faculty and administration at Luther Seminary for almost a decade. This conversation traces its beginning to the adoption of the institution's strategic plan in 2000, which was entitled "Serving the Promise of Our Mission." This plan launched initiatives in the field of congregational mission and leadership, with one tangible result being the creation of a research center on the missional church. *The Missional Church and Leadership Formation* is the third in a series of books examining the concept of the missional church, with this volume specifically intending to clarify the word "missional" and its implications for leadership formation. Eight scholars connected to Luther Seminary contributed to this volume: introduction (Craig Van

Gelder), three chapters on missional leadership formation in relation to theological education (Craig Van Gelder, Kyle J. A. Small, Richard H. Bliese), three chapters on missional leadership formation in relation to congregations (Scott Cormode, Sharon Henderson Callahan, Dave Daubert), and two chapters on missional leadership formation in relation to recent research (Terri Martinson Elton, Kristine M. Stache).

This book builds on the seminal work of Lesslie Newbigin who applied lessons gleaned from his years of missionary service in India to the increasingly post-Christian culture of England in the 1980's. A tangible result of this application in the United Kingdom was a movement known as the Gospel and Our Culture (GOC) conversation. Since the Gospel and Our Culture movement landed on American shores, Van Gelder has been a leading voice in this conversation.

Supported by the contributions of various authors writing in their area of specializations, the work as a whole has several strengths. Although the volume has some overlap in material and repeats some aspects of the conversation in certain chapters, the contributors provide a unified voice in the missional church conversation. Furthermore, the contributors pick up critical parts of the conversation related to leadership formation and demonstrate a significant level of collaboration in the volume.

First, the work is characterized by some compelling theological arguments related to the very nature of the church and its necessary activities (mission) in the world. On this point the contributors provide significant biblical and theological grounding to the concept of the missional church: connecting the church to the *missio Dei*. Throughout the volume, the contributors build on this foundation. In summary, this theological foundation asserts that “mission” is the work of the triune God who calls and sends the church into the world. As such the Holy Spirit is instrumental in preparing and guiding the church to participate fully in God’s mission. The work of the Spirit in the church is a process whereby He brings every area of the believer’s life and the local congregation’s activities under the leadership of God’s redemptive reign. Consequently, this book is to be commended for its intentionality in grounding practice to theological foundations.

A second strength of *The Missional Church and Leadership Formation* is that it provides an outstanding overview of the history of theological education (Van Gelder, chapter one), and an insightful critique of the purpose and objectives of theological education (Small, chapter two). In addition, Small demonstrates a thorough understanding of the issues related to the purpose of theological education. Small’s proposals provide steps toward connecting the task of

theological education to the *missio Dei*. Included in Small's proposals are the necessity of the academy and the church serving in educational synergy in preparing leaders for the missional church.

Finally, the authors skillfully present and illustrate a new paradigm for "vision" in the missional church. In juxtaposition to the popular concept of vision in the American church that places the senior pastor in the position of prophetic vision-caster, the contributors to this volume propose a paradigm more firmly grounded theologically. More specifically, Scott Cormode, Sharon Henderson Callahan, and Dave Daubert set forth and illustrate a workable model of "vision discerning" in which the local congregation collectively embarks on a journey in which the Spirit reveals a specific vision for transformation (individually and collectively) and mission in their own context.

Though overall *The Missional Church and Leadership Formation* is a very helpful resource, there are a few limitations worth noting. First, the work fell short in its objective of describing specifically how congregations can develop leadership capacity from a missional perspective. Although contributors effectively described missional theological education and missional congregations, much more could have been written about the synergistic relationship between the academy and church in leadership formation.

Finally, a few points in particular by Sharon Henderson Callahan (chapter five) seem to be over theologized. Commissioned with the task of addressing the issue of lay leadership in the missional church, Callahan presents numerous ministry vignettes and engages in theological overkill. Unfortunately, this chapter lacks the practical principles and workable initiatives that other contributors in the volume effectively delivered.

In conclusion, *The Missional Church and Leadership Formation* is a valuable contribution to the missional church conversation. Despite verbosity in a few places, the volume provides insightful principles and practices that would center theological education on the *missio Dei* and provide local congregations with a workable model for discerning their unique "vision" in fulfilling the purposes of God in the world.

Alvin Reid. *Evangelism Handbook: Biblical, Spiritual, Intentional, Missional*. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2009. pp. 480. \$24.99.

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